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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended to help people establish goals, objectives, activities, and evaluation tools for teaching elementary writing. The following topics are discussed: practical writing, invention, writing games, voice, personal writing, strategies and techniques teachers can use to enhance personal writing, teaching grammar and writing, evaluating growth in writing, basic skills and behavioral objectives, standardized tests, school accountability, program assessment through learning principles, and identifying problems. A final section outlines a sequence of steps for developing a writing program. Some examples of children's writing are included. (TS)

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A Rationale and Plan for

IMPROVING

WRITTEN EXPRESSION

In the Elementary Schools

Dr. Frank B. Brouillet

1975

This is a publication of the
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IN MEMORIAM

For Jack

"Words can not express all that we feel..." --We've heard that phrase far too often. But they are all we have at times, and while we all feel our inadequacy with them, they are now the best we have to offer. Jack Kittell gave many of us his words--and through them his feelings and experiences and values. He taught and influenced many teachers to help their students become aware of how their words and their lives can become one.

We offer, then, for Jack, not <u>our</u> words, but those of a child--the words he loved best.

"Being Alive"

The light, ripp ing waves hush upon the shore
Much like the sound of an angel whispering in my ear
Telling me of a peaceful meadow.

When the seagulls cry I can hear their shrill voices
Saying "Hi" to the world.

When I feel the light, dancing breezes skim across
my face,
I think of tree gods and fairy folk
Who dance in the soft moonlight, in the lush
green meadows.

As I taste the brisk salty air across my lips
I think of the fishing boats,
and my seafood-crazy uncle
Who is a "boat nut"!

When I smell the newly mown grass,
I am reminded of the many spring smells
Both bad and good.

As I see the scurrying crabs dancing
Lightly across the ocean floor
I am reminded of the many football games
Where the players are all wearing their armor-
like padding.

And when I hear the small gurgling sounds of
a duck-----

I SMILE!

--Tom Grant
Grade 6

In these words, and in the smiles of countless children whose teachers have carried and spread Jack's words and work, we know that Jack Kittell is, in a way that was very important to him, "Being Alive."

Jim Barchek
Frank Love
Charles Blondino

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PREFACE

As with school districts, this office often finds it difficult to develop all the projects that are needed to meet the educational needs of students in the state. Occasionally, though, there is a project which needs to be developed where the participants volunteer their time and resources because they believe the project ought to be accomplished. Such was the case with this document. Our special thanks go to Dr. Jack Kittell, University of Washington; Dr. Frank Love, Northshore School District; and Dr. James Barchek, Kent School District. Their willingness to participate has been deeply appreciated. Without their voluntary assistance this document might still be "waiting in line" for sufficient priority for funding.

As this document neared completion, several educators raised questions regarding the relationship between it, Creating A Language Learning Design and other numerous curriculum publications. To clarify, all curriculum documents produced by the Curriculum and Instruction Division of this office are in the form of suggestions and recommendations rather than mandates of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The publications have been developed for your examination and--if you so wish--personnel are available who can help you implement such points of view.

The writers have indicated that they see this document working within the framework of the Goals for the Washington Common Schools, approved by the State Board of Education in 1971. These goals have received the support of many educators throughout the state, and we are pleased that this document may further help districts improve programs which are moving in such a direction.

Robert Groeschell, Director
Program Development

INTRODUCTION

I first asked the writers to assist with this publication because I felt there were some unique problems which we were facing--and continue to face--in our elementary schools regarding both the development of writing competencies and the development of desirable attitudes toward writing. Writing assignments develop from what happens in the classroom; the success of an assignment often rests as much on what experience has preceded it as it does on what the child is doing while in the composing act. The chapters, therefore, tend to focus on both pre-writing and writing experiences.

"Should we correct all the mistakes the children make in their writing?" is often a concern of many teachers. The differentiating between practical and personal writing should be of some help here.

Another concern is the relationship between the teaching of writing and instruction in grammar. Though many elementary teachers agree that there is often little relationship between what students do in a grammar assignment and the way they write, there nevertheless is a feeling that there "ought" to be a relationship. So this problem is explored in some detail.

In my wanderings around the state I have found very few schools where attention to the writing program is accomplished, not merely at the classroom level, but also at the school level. The chapter on "Evaluating A Writing Program" has some suggestions for that problem.

Finally, "A Plan For Action" suggests some steps which a school faculty may find useful if teachers and administrators wish to improve student writing but are uncertain which steps to take first.

Charles Blondino, Supervisor
Language Arts Education

Goals appropriate for elementary written expression
selected from
GOALS FOR THE WASHINGTON COMMON SCHOOLS

The process of education should respect the uniqueness of each learner.

The process of education should provide learning experiences matched to each student's readiness to learn and the way he learns best.

The process of education should help each learner perform well and gain satisfaction from his performance.

The process of education should extend learning opportunities beyond the school building, school day and school year.

The process of education should self-renew through continuous evaluation of progress toward the desired learning outcomes.

As a result of the process of education, each student should have the basic skills and knowledge necessary to seek information, to present ideas, to listen to and interact with others and to use judgment and imagination in perceiving and resolving problems.

As a result of the process of education, each student should appreciate the wonders of the natural world, man's achievements and failures, his dreams and his capabilities.

SPECIAL APPRECIATION

The following educators were kind enough to read a preliminary copy of this document and offer suggestions to the writers. Their help was sincerely appreciated.

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The Writers

FOREWORD

What follows in this document is not a curriculum guide. It is not intended to be used as a set of goals, objectives, class activities or as an evaluation tool. It is intended to help people establish goals, objectives, activities and evaluation tools for elementary writing. It is a statement which concerns itself with such questions as: What is writing? What kinds of writing are there? Which kinds are valuable for elementary students? What sorts of strategies, activities and materials are helpful? How can I know if students are progressing satisfactorily? It is a statement about children's writing based on research, experience, the work and interests of children, and a broad collection of successes and failures on the part of the authors. It is, then, a beginning. A point of reference around which people can pull together to begin the task of creating in their schools a comprehensive, balanced writing program bringing to children benefits which are both personally satisfying and practical.

The Writers

PRACTICAL WRITING

Probably the most commonly held reason for the teaching of writing in our schools is that it has practical value. It is an important academic tool which a student can use in current work in social studies, science and other studies, and in his future academic pursuits in secondary school and college. It is likewise of importance to an adult in a career, and in the roles of participating citizen, consumer and correspondent.

And there is no doubt that these practical uses of writing are very real and very important. Writing is a "freeing" agent, a tool which enables one to reach out farther to touch unseen people, to speak at times other than the present. The teachers of writing should keep this broadening and liberating sense foremost as they teach in order to produce students who not only can, but will, add their own voices to the discussion of any issue with which they are concerned.

Achieving this purpose requires a program which builds skills in language beyond the conventions and traditional forms. To have truly "practical" skill, a writer must be able to communicate with a variety of audiences, in an unforeseen number of circumstances. And he or she should be able to do so easily, naturally and confidently.

We need, then, to focus that sense of practicality on those things which all effective writing shares--whether it be a friendly letter, a school report, an expression of opinion, an explanation of fact, a description of the physical or imaginative world or a narration of events.

Write a story about . . .

Tell how you feel . . .

Write a report on some aspect of African tribal life.

Describe your hypothesis, record the method of your experiment and explain the conclusions you have reached as a result of it.

Dear Sir:

Once again I would like to point out that you have my account in error.

To the editor:

To: Senator Harvey W. Jarvis

Dearest Ruth,

Invention

It is fundamental to the writing process that students see that they do have something to say, that their ideas, opinions and experiences are significant and interesting to others. In addition, pre-writing (or perhaps co-writing) skills in such areas as perception, imagination and logical thinking processes are also critical aspects of the writing process.

The skills of invention are, however, less directly teachable than a set of punctuation rules, and for that reason they have been taught less successfully. Students need, for example, to develop perceptual skills--the "poet's eye"--in order to elicit good descriptive writing. "Use more adjectives," is not enough to generate effective description for a student who is not aware of detail--who doesn't notice the subtle colors, the range of textures or the complex patterns in what he is describing. And "Be more logical" won't help a student whose mind is not used to dealing systematically with problems.

What will help is pre-writing activity--some work before students are asked to write which leads them to the point of having something to say. Before a descriptive writing assignment, for instance, spend some time looking at--and teaching, hearing, smelling, tasting--the physical objects they will be writing about. Do some "finger exercises" for a few minutes each day before a writing assignment. Try some writing "games" which result in someone reading a student's writing and responding.

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from
earth to heaven,
....and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

W. Shakespeare
Midsummer Night's Dream

Teacher: "Write about anything you want."

Student: "I don't want to write about anything at all."

Teacher: "Well, just tell about some interesting experience you've had. What's happened to you lately?"

Student: "Nothin'....Nothin' ever happens to me."

LAST WEEKEND WE WENT TO THE BEACH. WE SWAM AND PLAYED AROUND AND HAD LUNCH. THEN WE CAME HOME. THE END.

RALPH

Finger Exercises in Descriptive Writing

Describe the sound of walking on snow without using the word "crunch."
Write down the sound of a fingernail scraping the blackboard.
Write down how you think it would be to eat a raw oyster.

Write every day for just a few minutes.

Writing Games

Ask each student to write his or her name on a piece of paper and hide it on the playground somewhere.

When they return ask them to write directions for getting from the classroom door to their name. Give each set of directions to another student to use in locating the writer's hidden name. Those names located and returned in five minutes earn a reward for the writer.

Bring to class ten cups (or any objects)--similar in color but different in some ways. Ask students to describe one. Can the class tell which?

Purpose

While traditional writing textbooks have tended to teach students a number of conventional forms--the friendly letter, the business letter, the expository paragraph, etc.--a focus on rhetorical purposes which can be used in a variety of forms may prove to be a more flexible, adaptable and, hence, more practical approach. Purposes which should probably be studied and practiced at the elementary level include the following:

To explain: . . . . . .

To describe: . . . . . .

To report: . . . . . .

To entertain: . . . . . .

To record: . . . . . .

To explore: . . . . . .

. . . . . How to do something, how something works, how something was, what something is, why something is, how to get somewhere, who they are, how I feel.

. . . . . Things, places, people, feelings, events.

. . . . . What something is, what someone said, what someone did, what's going on.

. . . . . A funny thing happened to me on the way to . . ., I saw the most interesting thing I was so scared when . . ., and then he said . . .

. . . . . The minutes of the meeting, my experiment, my reactions, an event.

. . . . . How I feel about . . ., what I think about . . ., what it means, what might happen.

There are of course, a number of other purposes, such as projecting, predicting, etc., which can serve with equal effectiveness. The techniques used in effectively fulfilling these purposes can be used in all the conventional forms, but may also serve to provide a reservoir of technique and skill adaptable to an academic paper, a letter to a friend or a lyric poem.

Voice

Assumptions basic to the teaching of writing are that the writer is aware of his or her audience, is genuinely concerned with communicating effectively with someone different and will seek to use the most effective words to convey his or her most important ideas or experiences. Clearly, this ideal is not always realized, and some serious attention to the development of audience awareness, and to the options in the way this audience could be approached should be a part of any writing program.

Students should be aware of the alternatives available to them in the many "voices" they may use when writing or speaking, and be able to choose from those alternatives a voice they feel is most appropriate to the audience and purpose. Textbooks have traditionally valued the academic, objective voice ("Don't use you--use one") almost to the exclusion of other useful approaches.

The conventions of style have occupied a large part of the space in language textbooks and the time in languaging arts classes and, certainly, they are important as they relate to clarity of expression, achievement of purpose and effectiveness in reaching an intended audience. But another significant aspect to the teaching of style is the understanding that an individual's language is one part of his or her uniqueness as a human being and that a good writer's uniqueness is reflected in his or her own writing style. Each student's writing, then, should show knowledge of the conventions of writing, but also show evidence of his or her uniqueness as an individual human being.

"And so, my fellow Americans,
"Ask not what your country can do for you--
ask what you can do for your country.
"My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what
America will do for you, but what together we can do
for the freedom of man."

J. F. Kennedy
Inaugural Address
January, 1961

"Ya' see friends, me and m' brother, we make this
sausage in a little plant in our home town.
Now, don't it make sense? If I lied t' you,
I'd lose a good friend . . ."

Sausage Commercial

Worms, I think are squirmy and slimy.
But they don't really care.
They're happy as the rest of us
And they don't even have any hair. ---Debbie

Blue smells like a sweatshirt
Sweaty and unwashed. ---Ror

"Old Tree"

...A rickety stickety attic. ---Julie

Flowers ... smell like love. ---Julie H.

Sitting in the soft sand
Itching my very itchy hand
And watching the world go by. ---Susan

Yesterday was my toe's birthday...I gave him some new
slippers. He started running because he liked them.
Naturally I had to go too.

---Angela

Lighthouse

...shoots out rays like a miniature star and
sparkles on the roaring waves
Which explode on the decaying pilings.

---Eddie

PERSONAL WRITING

Personal writing experiences can result in several products, the most important being the child who, in the process, has found self-identity, self-realization and self-satisfying expression. The result may not be a complete piece of writing or any writing at all. The process itself may be enough in some cases to produce valuable personal insights.

A written product, however, has the potential of enabling the child to find release from pent-up emotions and through writing bring to conscious form much that has existed internally as a nebulous assortment of fantasies, fears and impressions. Writing can enable the child better to perceive and comprehend himself or herself, others and the fragile patterns of beauty.

Discovering, realizing and expressing the self are probably possible and necessary for all children and are among the most important objectives of education. They may take one or more of several possible forms and utilize one or more of several possible media of which oral and written composition are only two. All children should be afforded enough varied experiences to discover modes peculiarly suited to their individual natures. The most appropriate for any particular child may or may not be personal writing.

One basic goal in the area of personal writing toward which teachers can strive is to provide an environment in which the climate is conducive to personal introspection, imagination, exploration, experimentation; an environment in which there is enough freedom and security to be truly oneself--free from adult worries and social competition--free enough to allow the deep inner self to emerge and be expressed.

A second basic goal is to provide the child with the models and structures with which to facilitate effective self-expression. The teacher can familiarize the child with a variety of expressive techniques such as similes, rhythm and rhyme and a variety of structures and forms such as various types of poetry, drama and stories.

I am proud of me because...

My most awful moment was...

Disappointment is...

My Secret Self

"I don't really know me;

Surely it's important to know oneself.

Someday when I have time away from school and homework...

I'll meet me..."

Things I like about me are...

I get duck bumps all over when...

I AM
Bobby
Happy, carefree
Run, play, work
Happy, gay, free, good
Bobby

TEACHER GOALS:

I. Provide freedom to be oneself
Provide blocks of time
Provide for the greatest amount of pupil self-direction that each child is capable of managing comfortably.

II. Provide pupils with an environment of

A. Models of expressive techniques, rhythm, alliteration, similes, metaphors

B. Models of structure

Additional guidelines for enhancing effective personal writing include:

Developing a warm, positive and accepting relationship with each child.

Making children aware of the differences between the restrictions of practical writing and the freedom of personal writing.

Providing children with a variety of motivating stimuli of the imagination and options for interacting and responding.

Providing a variety of exemplars of the communicative-expressive arts--exemplars that please aesthetically, encourage introspection and invite a variety of interpretations.

Positively reinforcing children's personal writing.

Valuing the uniqueness of each individual child.

Respecting each child's right to privacy with personal writing. A secure child will eventually want to share his or her writing and with gentle guidance the teacher can induce a desire for attractive form, clarity and style.

SOME EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE STIMULI

Objects: toy, doll, selected junk sculpture, pomegranate

Topics: personal, everyday, faraway, nonsense, daydreaming

Stories: fairytales, fables, mysteries, humorous

Poems: sensory - "Galoshes"
imaginative - "Magic Michael," "Mulberry Street"

Drama: children's theater, TV, films

Visuals: still pictures - mythical animals, abstract art, impressionistic and realistic art, the unusual, the beautiful
films - nonverbal - "The Kite Story" and verbal

Auditory: natural sounds - creaking door, howling wind, birds
music - excerpts from Western, Oriental, mystery TV
selected classics - "Dance Macabre," "Peter and the Wolf"
selected popular - "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang"

Smells: fruits, spices, extracts, flowers, gasoline

Tactiles: a variety of textures and consistencies (sandpaper, wool, soap)

SOME STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES TEACHERS CAN USE

A. General Strategy: Autobiographical (Personal Experiences)

Purpose	Stimuli	Techniques
Emotional release, Self-identification, self-expression	Personal joys, disappointments, problems, family relationships & activities	"This is your Life" oral & written interviews, "A Day in My Life," etc.

B. General Strategy: Exploring the Senses

Purpose	Stimuli	Techniques
Perceptual development, Self-discovery, Skills in description	Materials to provide: tastes, smells, tactiles, sights, sounds	Find images of taste, smell, thought, & riddles of color & sound & combinations of these

C. General Strategy: Making It Strange or Serendipifying

Purpose	Stimuli	Techniques
Combining dissimilars, recombining the familiar, transforming to produce the unusual, the bizarre	Examples of combined unlikes in objects, visuals, descriptions, etc. into strange entities	Trial & error combining of parts from unlike wholes to produce pleasing, interesting unusual discoveries

D. General Strategy: Exploring and Experimenting With Models

Purpose	Stimuli	Techniques
Discovery, appreciation, comprehension of recognized structure & form	Literary genres & form, graphic art, sculpture, objects, music, movement, films	Parodies, imitation, satire, altering, repurposing, revising, etc.

TO ENHANCE PERSONAL WRITING

Product	Disposition
Diaries, journals, autobiographies, personal inventories, a letter to myself, resolutions	Complete privacy to qualified sharing

Product	Disposition
Games, poems, stories, descriptions, riddles	Sharing w/teacher, peers, parents, public

Product	Disposition
Ideas, descriptions, poems, stories, songs, chants, rituals, jokes	Sharing w/teacher, peers, parents, public

Product	Disposition
Essays, poems, plays, stories	Self (privacy), sharing w/others

E. General Strategy: Daydreaming and/or Fantasizing

Purposes	Stimuli	Techniques
To free, stimulate & encourage free reign of imagination	Mood music, abstract art, clouds, ink blots, starter topics, examples of imaginative writing	Est. of climate, "Dream Drifting," "Three Wishes," magic words, carpets, lamps, etc. Gradual reduction of external stimuli necessitating the giving of more "self"

F. General Strategy: Multi-Media Mix

Purposes	Stimuli	Techniques
To combine different media in new and different ways for beauty, interest, pleasure	A variety of multi-media mix, Examples: "quilted stories," pop poems, code stories, etc.	Blending the senses, moving from models to combining found parts, to producing new parts, to creating new wholes in mixed media

G. General Strategy: Dramatization (Creating Happenings)

Purposes	Stimuli	Techniques
To involve total self, to explore roles of others through empathic experiences	Shared inter- and intra-personal problems, dilemma stories, value clarification problems, Children's Theater	Prompted, scripted and free roletaking; story theater; creative dramatics, dramatic play

Product	Disposition
Descriptions, stories, poems, pictures, songs, dances, games	Total privacy to public sharing

Product	Disposition
Illustrated poetry, choreographed poetry, musical stories, mini-operas, narrated mime, dramas	Sharing w/teacher, peers, parents, public

Product	Disposition
Creative dramatic productions, personalized fables, dramatized stories, drama scripts, audio and video taped productions, puppet shows, etc.	Sharing w/teacher, peers, parents, public

A teacher is effective in enhancing personal writing when it is observable that children have demonstrated any of the following:

1. Identified personal purposes for writing.

2. Found satisfaction from the process and/or the product of personal writing.

3. Engaged in and produced personal writing, that is--

   writing they did because they wished to,

   writing that released tensions or emotions,

   writing that reflected the personality of the child who produced it,

   writing a child felt strongly about as indicated by a strong desire either to share or keep private,

   writing that reflected divergent thinking or feeling,

   writing which over a period of time required less and less dependence on others,

   writing that demonstrated familiarity with and some skill in the use of literary techniques,

   writing that generated or provoked responses of interest, appreciation, concern, action and a variety of interpretations.

As has been pointed out elsewhere in this booklet, the development of basic skills of writing is an essential goal for elementary school children. The minimal requirements probably include reasonable accuracy in basic punctuation, simple sentence structure, a basic vocabulary with reasonably legible handwriting, comprehensible spelling and no strong inhibitions about using written language.

"My day has been fantastic because the weather was beautiful. The weather was absolutely perfect. There was a strong breeze. I even found out that two boys liked me."

Mary

"ALL ABOUT TODAY

Today I went to the doctor because I have a stiff neack. I also misted half of school. When I got to school my neack was harting very bad. It was a good day.

jan

"March 2, 20 cenutrei 1972

I was the Blob Bloping around
un-funulizing kids.
I had the everyday killers the windups and
skwishers.
Not so good, but really bad.

Nancy"

Almost all of these requirements can be learned through guidance, constant use and positive reinforcement. Perhaps the most effective reinforcement is that provided through children's realization of the contributions the required conventions make to their recognized success and feelings of satisfaction in their personal writing.

It should be made clear that these minimal requirements are in no way considered unimportant. In fact, it is believed that mastering basic structure and mechanics actually enables greater eventual freedom and depth of achievement in personal writing. Perhaps concern is most warranted when form and social conventions become ends in themselves and out of balance with and at the expense of thought, sensitive perception, imagination, self-realization and true self-expression.

"Early next morning, and I mean Early,
Johnny rased into his mothers, and fathers room,
and said, Can I go, huh, huh? What in the, said
Mr. Soupy. Or rather yawned it out. Well, it's
6:30 in the MORNING, boamed his father..."

"They went To the sTore and To Test him
when THey got THere John ran To The Toys
and Tuched a Truck Till every Thing fell down."

Traditionally, textbooks which have had improvement in writing skill as one of their objectives have included a great deal of work in grammar. Students have spent much of their time analyzing sentences written by the textbook authors, naming their parts and identifying their patterns. Some of them become very proficient at their work--and then shock us by turning in writing of their own which is very poor. "What," we ask, "is happening?" The answer lies, in part at least, in some understanding of the ways in which our language works, and the ways in which students learn.

Almost without exception our native born students have enough familiarity with their language by the time they enter school to have mastered most of the grammar of English in their oral language.

Most of them speak easily, clearly and effectively enough to satisfy their needs. Some are shy, of course, but shyness is not related to their language ability. Stories, dictated by kindergarten children to their teachers, typically show very complex sentence patterns and duplicate most of those used by adults. The major difference is often one of usage--of selecting words, phrases or pronunciations not considered a part of the prestige dialect we call "standard English."

To restate this distinction in a more specific manner, suppose one of your students were to write or speak the following sentence: "Teacher, I ain't got no money for lunch." Most of us would probably react to such creative use of the language by some comment about bad grammer, but in an exact sense the problem is not one of grammar. In its utilization of the sound system, formalization of sounds into words and the patterning of these words into an intelligible comment, Teacher, I ain't got no money for lunch, is a grammatical English sentence. The problem is one of usage and not grammar. Ain't as a contraction of do not in this sentence has never achieved a respectable level of usage in any formal communication. Got, while passing muster more in American usage than in British, is still relegated to a low usage status. The problem of the double negatives not and no, while not changing our understanding of the meaning intended by this utterance, nevertheless, for rather curious historical reasons is forbidden to users of the English language at any standard or formal level of communication.

Linguist: Grammar is the meaningful arrangement of forms in a language, according to the four taxemes of ORDER, MODULATION, MODIFICATION and SELECTION. In languages which use bound forms, the grammar consists of SYNTAX and MORPHOLOGY, with the constructions of compound words and phrase-derivatives occupying an intermediate position. The DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR of a language consists of PHONOLOGY (PHONETICS and PHONEMICS), MORPHEMICS (MORPHOPHONEMICS, ARRANGEMENT, MORPHOLOGY), SYNTAX and LEXICOLOGY. Various other classifications within the field of grammar are possible (de la Garza). See also CONSTRASTIVE (also DESCRIPTIVE, NORMATIVE, PRESCRIPTIVE TRANSFER, TRANSFORM) GRAMMAR. [A Glossary of Linguistic Terminology, Mario Pei.]

Teacher: "Wow! Impressive. Does it help kids write better?"

Linguist: "It's the most accurate description of our language presently available."

Teacher: "Yes, I see that. But does studying it help kids write better?"

Linguist: "Study of the structure of our language is an important part of the discipline of English."

Teacher: "Well, okay. But....."

Linguist: "All right, all right. No--it probably won't help directly in building writing skills. We never claimed it would. It's a fascinating study, worthwhile for its own sake. Isn't that reason enough?"

"I ain't got no..." "They don't want no..." "We ain't never..."

"Another Saturday night and I ain't got nobody..."
Cat Stevens, "Saturday Night"

"He never yet no villany never said to nobody."
Geoffrey Chaucer
Prologue to Canterbury Tales

"Bad grammar," Geoffrey?

Fine distinctions as to how problems of language are to be classified do not obviously make these problems disappear. But having a clearer understanding of the basis of learning problems can often make our prescriptions for their solution much more effective.

It may be worthwhile to look quickly at the question of meaning in those communications which violate our sensibilities of what is proper in language. Going back to our example of Teacher, I ain't got no lunch money, it should be readily apparent that the meaning intended in this utterance is intelligible. The problem here is one of image rather than message. A user of language who ignores or is oblivious to the levels of usage appropriate to given situations will probably communicate his idea or intent, but he will also pay a price for this communication. This price is likely to include the social rejection of the user as a person of worth as well as a rejection of his ideas. When we work with children in matters of correctness in language, we should be honest with them and explain as best we can about the nature of linguistic prejudice and its impact on both the message of the communication and the image of the communicator.

As teachers, we should also be aware of what we can do to help students who come to us with a language facility which does not enable them to operate at a standard level of usage. Assigning extra exercises in the textbook will probably not be of much help. Grammar and usage are an important part of human behavior and like all behaviors are altered minimally by cognitive exercise. Research indicates we should stress patterned drills and model many examples of the level of language we are attempting to get our students to emulate.

Some of the same observations which can be made about the development of oral language can also apply to written language. Researchers have spent many years attempting to identify the impact that a study of grammar has on the development of writing ability, and for the most part the results have been very disappointing. Research findings and our own experiences in working with children should make us suspicious or at least cautious in our expectations of the impact instruction in grammar will have on the quality of our students' written work.

Sociologist: "Linguistic prejudice can be as damaging as prejudice in its other forms."

Teacher: "But standard English does exist, doesn't it? Shouldn't kids know how to use it properly?"

Sociologist: "We've got to work together to stamp out this kind of linguistic bigotry."

Teacher: "But the standardized tests...."

Sociologist: "Standardized tests are culturally biased."

Employer: "I wouldn't think of hiring him. He had two misspelled words on his job application."

Use improvised drama, role playing, language games, writing situations which lead the student to the kind of language we are seeking.

Research tells us that it takes at least 10,000 repetitions of a behavior to get it deeply engraved in our nervous system.

"I don't know what's the matter with schools today. My fifth grader writes like a ten year old."

Then, What Should We Teach?

If a formal study of grammar is not a positive, fail-safe prescription to the writing ills of our students, what is the answer? There is quite possibly no single answer to our question, only tentative answers. The distinction established previously between grammar and the conventions of encoding and usage can provide a beginning. We all feel responsible for aiding our students in establishing some minimal competencies in written language and these should include the rudiments of spelling, punctuation and a grasp of at least the essential feel of standard usage. If we are not to give our souls over to total despair, we must also operate from an assumption that these can be to some greater or lesser degree taught.

Such an assumption does raise, however, the further questions of when and how these conventions are to be taught. The question of when and to what degree the brakes of mechanics and usage are to be applied in writing instruction is vital. Far too many of our former students have reached adulthood with an almost psychotic fear of writing. We are faced with the apparent dilemma of needing to encourage and reinforce positively the writing of our students while at the same time emphasizing mechanics and usage, which can often foster a negative mentality.

How Can We Do That?

A possible way out of this contradiction is to establish a dual approach to teaching writing as is being suggested in this publication. By utilizing the distinction between practical and personal writing it is possible in our classrooms to develop two separate, but related, instructional modes for achieving a comprehensive writing program. To achieve the freedom in composition which we hope will lead to a confidence and enjoyment in written expression, a significant part of the total time allotted to writing instruction in the elementary school should be devoted to a <u>personal</u> writing strand. As the term implies, this type of writing deals with the internal, subjective workings of each child's imagination. It is personal thought and emotion objectified on paper and has as its appropriate forms stories, poetry and letters. Because it is personal, the way we as teachers react to this type of writing must be positive and supporting. The students must feel free to share or not share what they have written. If they decide to share their work, it should be read aloud. The primary purpose of such writing

"Writing is such a highly creative thing that you can't really teach it. Putting an idea into effective shape is not like adding 2 + 2."

"Right! But the conventions of written language can be taught, and students need to be able to use them."

"But won't that sort of dull drill kill creativity?"

"It doesn't have to be taught through dull drill."

What does the fact that most adults fear writing tell us about our teaching practices?

The results of the recent National Assessment of Educational Progress tend to substantiate this fear. Of the young adults who agreed to take part in the overall assessment, 29 percent refused to even attempt the writing exercise. One plausible cause of this fear of writing can be traced to the undue emphasis on negative responses many of us have incorporated into our teaching of writing.

"Won't talking about two kinds of writing confuse kids?"

"I don't think so. It's real; we all write things for our own use--grocery lists, class notes, reminders, diaries, journals--and also write for others to read--letters, reports, class papers, curriculum projects, articles, etc. The demands on our writing are very different for those two kinds of experiences."

experience is the satisfaction of the authors and the enjoyment of their peers. The standards of correctness in matters of spelling, mechanics and usage are generally inappropriate for the writing generated in this instructional model. As teachers we should have as our objectives for this approach to writing the development of the child's imagination and perception. The development of the habit of externalizing thoughts and emotions in writing and the attendant growth in sensitivity to language and experience are also important objectives. Such experience should have, too, the additional benefit of supporting the normal developmental process whereby a child moves from the egocentric world of childhood to the decentered, externalized world of the mature adult.

Since the vast majority of children enter school speaking English, there should be a natural transition from the free, spontaneous interplay of oral communication to the unrestrained mode of personal writing. While there are in the later stages of development real differences between oral and written language, in the primary grades written language should closely approximate the oral. The commonly utilized method of oral diction is a good example of a practice which attempts to do precisely this. If we are convinced as teachers that confidence and sense of personal worth are essential to the learning process, then it would seem logical to give personal writing a major emphasis in the early grades.

"A primary goal of our schools should be to train and expand the imagination."

Have you tried cinquain, haiku, tanka, diamante?

School
hard, educational
tiring, thinking, sickening
desks, notebooks, television, sleepy
resting, playing, going
fun, relaxation
Vacation

---Mary
Grade 4

Imagination and perception are an important part of writing and more basic to the writing act than what have traditionally been called "basic skills."

Good oral language facility should precede written language.

Jokes (why do elephants ...? what do you get if you cross a ...?) jump rope songs, funny names, rhyming games--all reflect a healthy and necessary part of the language facility pattern.

Really care about what children say--not just how they say it.

EVALUATION OF GROWTH IN WRITING

Of all traditional school subjects, writing is perhaps the most difficult to assess in terms of acceptable grade level performance and growth. In reading, it is less difficult to determine an accurate performance level for a youngster and to monitor subsequent growth in acquired skills. In mathematics, growth in computational and conceptual skills can also be assessed with relative ease and validity, but the assessment of growth in writing is a much more complex, perplexing matter which defies any simple testing formula.

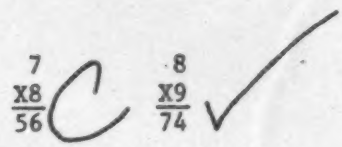
Self-Evaluation Through Models

Since writing comes from the internal workings of the human intellect and imagination and as such is unlike reading which has an external, objectified reality, the development within the writer of a critical sense which passes judgment on his work is essential to success. In the development of this critical, editorial sense models of successful work are important. Unfortunately, many of the models we traditionally provide for children are counter-productive. The textbooks which youngsters use have all been written by adults and provide highly edited models of good writing which in most cases greatly exceed the proficiency level of the children. The same can be said for all the books children experience since the tedious editorial function--the countless revisions and re-revisions--is masked by the final process of printing. Children naturally overrate the adult world and many really believe that good writing is something that is produced on the first attempt in the form they observe in books. As teachers we must dispel this notion and provide models which are realistic. One way that this can be accomplished is by choosing samples from each grade level which in the teachers' judgments represent the best work produced by children for the various standard written assignments. A committee of teachers can then analyze these samples for growth in writing skills. This analysis should include accomplishments in mechanics such as spelling, punctuation and capitalization; levels of language usage; sentence and paragraph structure; generation of ideas and perceptions and the addition of details to the writing structures the children produce. These models should be shared with students either by reproducing copies or by producing transparencies for use on the overhead

And then they run over tch hi/ to,

Torrd the occen.

Teacher: Where shall I begin with this one?



Teacher: Ah, it feels so nice to be certain!

Then, Punia, holding tightly to his bag, jumped into the water. King Kai opened his mouth very wide, and Punia stepped inside. Quickly Punia took the two large pieces of strong wood out of his bag. He put them between King Kai's jaws so the shark-king could not close his mouth. King Kai was angry, and he went dashing and splashing through the water.

Student: But I can't write like that!

Teacher: You can use it as a model, though.

Student: But it will never sound that good.

Teacher: Just do your best.

Student: Can I see what some other kids have done? Some that write like me?

projector. If this procedure is continued over several years, a school will have on hand many excellent samples of written work which can be used for children to model. Another helpful procedure is to have students develop their own books with the writer keeping the original work and a duplicated copy available in the library. An additional benefit which accrues from these procedures is the heightened awareness of staff as to the competencies realistically expected of children in writing at the various grade levels.

As teachers become better aware of writing achievement at all grade levels, it is possible for a total building staff to set goals for each grade level. An excellent resource to assist in the process of goal setting is the K-12 Course Goals in Language Arts available from the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington.

Once models and goals have been generated, it is important to incorporate these into the normal instructional practices of the classroom. The models, of course, should be shared with the children in order to promote a natural process of emulation. The goals should also be shared. The practice of holding individual conferences with the children is an excellent means to achieve the internalization of models and goals which should lead to a heightened critical sense. Samples of the children's work should be kept in folders with notes recording the major points stressed in each conference. These annotations can be used to communicate to the children where they have shown improvement in writing and to identify areas which may need additional work. Writing folders which include samples of a child's work plus records of his or her progress as perceived by the teacher are also an excellent resource for communicating with parents at conference time.

Teacher: What a relief this library of student writing is! I let the children read some of the stories and we talk about them before we write in class. Now, not only do we have writing models, but the children know that their writing will be printed, too. It makes them want to continue to improve their writing--and they want to write more frequently!

Sample goals:

The student values a society which provides freedom to express and communicate facts, ideas and opinions.

The student is able to choose language that is appropriate for the purpose and audience for which he or she is writing.

The student is able to write original myths and fables.

Teacher: Tommy, do you think you are writing better now than at the beginning of the school year?

Tommy: I don't know. I guess so. I'm trying.

Teacher: Let's look at some of your writing from the beginning of the year. I think you'll see you've made some progress.

Basic Skills and Behavioral Objectives

The zeal which dedicated teachers show in amassing evidence to support the growth their children are attaining in compositional skills can be, if not tempered, dangerous, perhaps even inimical, to a natural development in writing especially to the development of a creative dimension. Some use of behavioral or performance objectives may be appropriate in sharpening the instructional focus. But since spelling, punctuation, capitalization, handwriting, sentence and paragraph conventions are the easiest areas to assess in writing, there is the ever present danger that we may pay them too much homage and, in so doing, subtly communicate to our students that these are the elements which really matter in writing. We should continually remind ourselves that matters such as perception, purpose and integrity of creation are also elements which are of primacy in any act of composition.

Standardized Tests

The standardized tests which currently exist have little to offer in terms of measuring growth in writing. Even though most such standardized achievement tests contain sections which purport to measure language facility and fluency, there is no hard evidence that scores in these areas correlate very well with writing ability. In the present climate of crash programs to achieve accountability, the attraction of simple solutions to solve complex problems should be avoided.

Given 10 word groups, some of which contain simple sentences, the student can identify the sentences and the fragments with 80% accuracy within 10 minutes.

Teacher: Well, O.K. I want the children to be able to distinguish between sentences and fragments, but what we sometimes call fragments communicate ideas better than sentences. So why not use them? I really want my students to understand how to write appropriately for an audience. But maybe that's just another objective stated more broadly.

Principal to Staff at faculty meeting: In our district standardized test scores we improved in decoding skills, but our writing skills are still too low. We're just going to have to get our students to write more. Fortunately, our fifth grade score in writing showed a significant improvement. I asked Mr. _____ to report on how that occurred.

Mr. _____: Well, to be honest, last year's class wrote fewer stories and themes. However, we did spend a lot of time completing tests about writing, and we tried to use a format similar to the one used in the standardized test.

Principal: You mean you spent less time in actual writing and more time in preparing students for the test?

Mr. _____: That's right.

Principal: No--that's wrong.

If a school or school district truly wishes to measure student growth in writing, the approach of analyzing student writing at all grade levels and over several years has the greatest potential for both improving children's written work and the teachers' perceptions of strategies most appropriate for bringing this about.

Other sorts of indicators, too, can help a principal and staff to determine if sufficient attention is being given to the writing program. The following questions offer some help:

1. Are there school objectives which indicate that the staff will work together to examine and improve the writing program?

2. Do our students enjoy writing?

The objectives should focus on staff activities. We need to agree on where to focus our own energies.

Ask your students to list what they enjoy doing in school. With what frequency is writing listed? How do these results compare with last year?

Ask your students how much voluntary writing they do.

As you talk with students, ask them if there is anything they've recently written that they particularly enjoyed.

3. How do we show our students that our school values their writing?

4. How do we involve our community in student writing projects?

Print a school newspaper where students can communicate about what interests them. Encourage students to share interests through their writing--such as favorite recipes or their funniest moments.

Display student writing in the room and halls.

Invite parents and principals to look at our student writing.

Encourage students to read their writing to student and adult audiences.

Encourage students to write short skits for classroom performances.

Encourage students to "act out" their own stories and the stories of other students.

Arrange in the school library a special place to house a collection of student writing.

Develop a series of student writings about a favorite story character, a character created by some students or a fictionalized real character such as a dog which is always around the school.

Involve your students in writing letters that really get answered.

Have older students interview the elderly to find out what life was like in our community years ago or from what sort of places the elderly came. For a model, see the Foxfire materials.

Encourage civic groups to listen to students reading their own writing.

Start a parent volunteer program where parents volunteer two hours to work individually with children.

Involve students in community projects--volunteer to make posters, write and distribute flyers and ads, publicize community events, take an active part in local celebrations.

5. How do we know our students are improving in their writing skills?

Program Assessment Through Learning Principles

The efforts of educators in identifying key elements of the learning process can be helpful in determining the effectiveness of a writing program. For instance, teachers may agree that they are providing a sufficient number of writing experiences, that they seek to counsel students individually on their writing, and still children are disinterested in writing. In such cases an examination of some basic learning principles may be helpful. The questions on the opposite page are not exhaustive,* but may be of some help:

* These questions have been developed from "Theory into Practice" materials written by Madeline Hunter, Principal, University Elementary School, UCLA. For information write TIP Publications, P.O. Box 514, El Segundo, California, 90245. For further information on the "Theory into Practice" program in the State of Washington, contact Roberta LaCoste, Assistant Director for Elementary Education, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Olympia, Washington 98504.

Have a "How We've Improved" bulletin board with student writing samples from two or three years ago and the present.

Ask teachers for samples of student writing each time stories, poems or descriptive writing are assigned. Make a list of the variety of assignments so teachers can learn from one another.

Ask the staff to occasionally check their writing assignments against their goals. Are we pursuing the goals appropriately? How do we know?

How often are students writing?

Goals/Objectives

Do the students understand what is expected?

Do the students know why they are involved in this activity?

Monitoring

What specific student responses suggest students are performing satisfactorily?

Motivation

What is in the assignment that really appeals to the children?

Is there a suitable level of tension regarding the assignment?

Too much? None at all?

Is the writing going to be used with an audience?

Reinforcement

How are we encouraging students to continue to write well?

Do students know the specific skills and knowledge they have mastered?

Do we continue to stress and reward the elements of good writing when students are writing in other curriculum areas?

Transfer

Are we consciously trying to use in new situations the writing skills learned previously?

Are some of the writing skills we are teaching useful in out-of-class situations?

Are we stressing broad principles and generalizations as well as specific details?

Retention

Are we providing adequate practice for initial learning of a skill?

Are we providing intermittent practice to assure long retention?

Do we particularly stress mastery of essential writing skills?

A PLAN FOR ACTION

The Preface stated that this document "is intended to be used to help people establish goals, objectives, activities and evaluation tools for elementary writing." It is a "point of reference around which people can pull together to begin the task of creating in their schools a comprehensive, balanced writing program which can result in bringing to children benefits which are both personally satisfying and practical." Assuming that this booklet has been of some help in understanding the nature of writing tasks, the next step would be to suggest a reasonable problem-solving sequence of events to build the writing program which is desired. Schools have learned long ago that the most effective way to deal with problems is to identify and prioritize them, set goals, identify alternative strategies of getting there, select the most appropriate way, do it and determine how well it was accomplished. And that is precisely what ought to be done with the task of developing a writing program. Perhaps this elaboration of a sequence with some suggestions may be helpful.

Identifying/Prioritizing Problems	Are we reasonably pleased with our student performance in writing? Can they vary their writing tone for different audiences? Check through this booklet and identify other potential problems. How do teachers feel about their classroom writing program? Where do they sense they need help? Do we use a wide variety of activities but ignore principles of learning?

Setting Goals

How are we encouraging better writing on a schoolwide basis? Do we have a library of student writings? Are we together examining student writing and getting a sense of student growth? Do our teachers understand what pre-writing and writing skills are prerequisites for other skills?

List the problems, identify two or three significant ones which you believe you can change.

Restate your problems in terms of what you would like to have happen. "We'll begin a collection of student writings in our library. By next Fall we'd like to have at least 200 stories." Or "We want our students to be able to write to several real audiences." Indicators for this goal would be evidences in children's writing that (1) there have been assignments focusing on varied audiences and (2) that the tone of the papers vary.

Often our first reaction when discussing goals is to think of curriculum guides. Obviously curriculum statements serve a valuable purpose in describing our intentions for children. But guides ought to emerge from what we see children are as well as what we wish children to become. Our problem-solving sequence should help us begin to identify what "we see children are" and to develop goals based on that information.

Identifying Alternative Strategies	Brainstorm some ways of achieving your goals. Don't overlook calling in others to give ideas, too. Put these ideas on butcher paper and leave them in the faculty room for a week or so. Tell teachers to add ideas to the list as they think of them.
Selecting Strategies	More than one per goal may be needed. Try to involve several persons in the action.
Doing It	Be certain each major task has someone assigned to follow it through. Avoid getting too involved with detailed time lines. Keep it simple, open, reasonable.
Evaluating What's Been Done	Look back at your goal statements and what would be acceptable indicators of improvement. Now that work on the project has progressed, there may be better indicators that can be identified. Remember that the purpose of this evaluation is to clearly show you--and others who might be interested--how you are developing a better writing program for children.

POSTWORD

So there it is: research, points of view, activities, plans. More suggestive than exhaustive. More a "help to" than a "please do." And there is really more help than is apparent in this small document. Numerous educators in schools and colleges are available to assist with inservice training and ideas for program development. The Washington State Council of Teachers of English and the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction also have the specific task of assisting you in your program. We hope you will call on them.

A poem about the Fog and Me

One day the fog and me.
Were as happy as can be,
For we were as quiet as can be,
Cause no one could be as quiet as we,
The fog and me.

By Risa Osborn